

By JEFF GLOR CBS NEWS June 23, 2015, 7:22 PM

Top Takata executive under fire during Senate hearing

A top executive with the Japanese airbag manufacturer, Takata, felt the heat today during a Senate hearing. Takata airbags can explode with too much force, sending metal into the car. Eight deaths are now linked to this.

It has lead to the largest recall in U.S. history-- nearly 34 million airbags.

No one knows the cost of these airbags better than Alexander Brangman.

The accident seemed minor. A rented Honda civic involved in a fender bender in Los Angeles last September. Alexander Brangman's daughter, Jewel, an aspiring actress, was driving.



Jewel Brangman, 26, pictured with her father, Alexander Brangman. Jewel is now the 8th and latest death linked to a faulty Takata airbag and the first to die in a rental car.

"She was at this particular event earlier and she texted me a picture like she always did," he said. "She said I love my life. She said I love my life."

The impact of the fender bender triggered deployment of a Takata airbag that ruptured and severed Jewel's carotid artery.

"Two San Diego police officers came to my door asked me my name," Alexander Brangman explained. "And they had my daughters name and my life changed from that particular point."

Jewel Brangman, only 26, is now the 8th and latest death linked to a faulty Takata airbag and the first to die in a rental car.

During today's hearing some senators wondered why rental car companies are not required to get recalled vehicles fixed or tell drivers about defects.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal Connecticut-D pressed Takata to set up a fund to compensate victims of its faulty airbags.

"Rental car companies need to be held accountable," he said.

Sen. Bill Nelson Florida-D also cited new documents that he says show Takata put off safety inspections.

"Internal e-mails suggest they actually suspended global safety audits from '09 to '11 for cost-cutting reasons," said Nelson. "And now the same company responsible for this disaster is the one making nearly all of the replacement airbags for most of the recalled vehicles. That doesn't sit well with a lot of Americans."

Takata North American Executive Vice President Kevin Kennedy insisted the company is trying to do the right thing now by recalling about 34 million airbags - and searching for a root cause.

"I just want to repeat how deeply sorry we are for all the pain and suffering we have caused," Kennedy said.

Also testifying, the head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, hit with a scathing report Monday that said the agency routinely misses major safety problems in American cars.

"This audit report is one of the worst I've ever seen," said Sen. Claire McCaskill Missouri-D. "This is about blatant incompetent mismanagement."

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